

**Amendments to the Specification:**

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 7, line 15, with the following rewritten paragraph:

The gripper assembly 20 is attached to the positioning mechanism (not shown) by an adapter ~~(not shown)~~ 34. A bottom circular clamp 38 encloses the cylinder 22 to form a pneumatic actuator, although the actuator may also be actuated by electrical or hydraulics.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 7, line 19, with the following rewritten paragraph:

When a vessel is picked up by gripper members 30, the plunger 26 pushes the piston 24 up. When a vessel is to be placed down, pressurized air is applied to the piston 24 to push the plunger down, which in turn pushes the vessel out of the gripping members 30. The movement of the piston can be detected by a sensor ~~(not shown)~~ 40, which can detect the magnetic field of magnet 28. The sensor may be mounted on the exterior sidewall of the cylinder 22 or on the bottom circular clamp 38 of the adapter. This magnet-sensor combination provides a means of verifying whether a vessel has been picked up or placed down. While a magnet sensor is described in this embodiment, it is understood that other possible types of sensors may also be utilized. Examples of such a sensor include, but are not limited to, inductive, capacitive and optical sensors.